NETBOX
MANAGED IT

EBOOK

Moving Your Business to the Cloud

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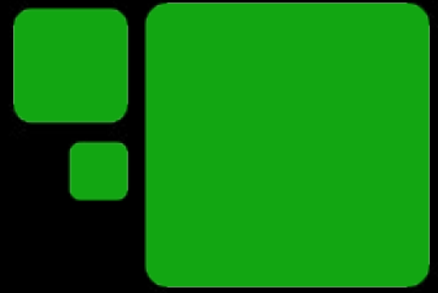
For many business leaders, it started with the BlackBerry. Remember those?

The BlackBerry was one of the first devices to showcase the power of cloud computing, even before the term "cloud computing" was widely used. By the time the iPhone dethroned the BlackBerry as the smartphone of choice, a new idea was already settling in... It's possible to stay connected nearly 100% of the time.

The implications were huge. They still are. And as more data and services live in the cloud, it gets easier and easier to access whatever you need, from wherever you are.

In this eBook, we'll explore the idea of businesses moving to the cloud. We'll work through some key questions to help you determine if cloud solutions would be a good fit for you. We'll also discuss some of the creative ways cloud services are making business easier, both in the office and on the go.

Love them or hate them, BlackBerries are largely a thing of the past. But the cloud? The cloud is here to stay.

CHAPTER ONE:

Does a Move to the Cloud Make Sense?

We have a bit of prep work to do before we get into the details of cloud computing and how your business might use it. First, we need to determine if it's even a good fit for your organization.

Most likely, cloud computing will be a good fit. After all, 90% of businesses use some kind of cloud service, and 50% prefer cloud-based solutions whenever possible. But just because cloud-based options are popular right now doesn't mean they're the best option for you.

Fortunately, it's relatively easy to see if cloud solutions make sense for your business. Just answer the following six questions.

By the end of this chapter, you'll have a good idea of whether to move your business to the cloud.

Do You Like It When Things Just Work?
Cloud applications combine the reliability of local programs with two big productivity boosts.

The first is purely pragmatic. When you work with cloud solutions, you don't have to worry about maintenance, installation, or upgrades. All of that is handled for you by the service provider. That frees your IT staff to focus on something more productive than basic upkeep.

The second is just as powerful. When implemented and configured correctly, cloud services integrate seamlessly with your other software solutions. The resulting cohesion makes it easier for you and your team to get things done.

"90% of businesses use some kind of cloud service, and 50% prefer cloud-based solutions whenever possible."

– Skyhigh

Is Your Business Growing?

If business is booming, you already know all about growing pains. One of the few downsides of success is that it can be hard to keep up. The cloud makes it considerably easier.

Cloud services are designed to be both flexible and scalable. The very same tools work equally well for enterprise organizations and small businesses. In most cases, you just have to choose the level of service and options you want. Pay for exactly what you need – no more, no less. No capital expenditures.No hardware obsolescence. And an end to buying power and capacity you don't need.

When your business expands, simply add to your subscription. The malleable nature of cloud solutions makes them perfect for a business in the middle of a growth spurt.

How Do You Feel About Variety?

Speaking of options, cloud computing has them in spades.

First, there's a huge variety of services available. Competition among cloud providers is intense. As the end-user, that plays in your favor. Whatever your specific needs, there are cloud solutions to fit the bill.

Second, within each service provider's offerings, you'll find tiers of service, add-ons, and customization options. If your organization has unique requirements, no problem. There are even solutions out there that meet the stringent demands of highly regulated industries, like the medical field (HIPAA).

Does Mobile Access Make It Easier for You to Do Business?

Remote access is another major advantage of cloud services. We'll dive deeper into this topic in chapter four.

When your data and applications live in the cloud, you're set up to work from almost anywhere. All you need is an Internet connection and a smart device. Neither you nor your staff is tied to a desktop computer at the office.

Get things done on-the-go on your laptop, tablet, or even on your smartphone.

Do You Value Security?

Of course, you do. You can't afford not to.

Cloud solutions help protect your critical data. Any reputable cloud provider will back up your data and provide built-in disaster recovery. At the same time, reputable cloud providers provide a level of redundancy and security that is far more than what most small and mid-size organizations are capable of doing themselves. The reality is that properly architected cloud solutions are often MORE secure than in-house servers

A word of warning, though. It pays to do your homework here. Make sure the provider you select encrypts your data, promises solid up-time and has a plan for recovery should anything go wrong.

Are You a Fan of Saving Money?

We're not talking chump change. The potential for savings is significant.

Take cloud-based ERP systems as an example. Compared to traditional on-premise solutions, cloud ERPs save businesses about one-third of the initial cost. Not only that, but cloud solutions are typically faster to roll out.
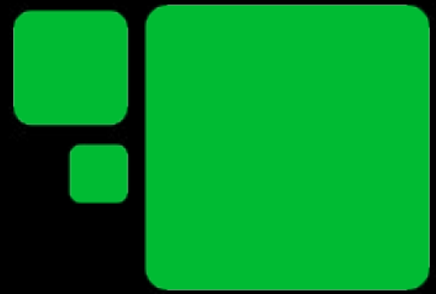
Time for a Change?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, it might be time to make some changes. In the following chapter, we'll dig a little deeper into what makes cloud solutions so convenient.

CHAPTER TWO:

Embrace the Convenience of the Cloud

There are five areas where the convenience of the cloud really comes through: Speed, Sophistication, Stability, Security and Remote Access. We'll cover the first three in this chapter. Security and Remote Access are big enough to warrant chapters of their own.

Speed

Implementation can be a painful thing. It's a shame, really. Picking a new technology solution is stressful. You don't want to follow that up immediately with an unpleasant implementation experience.

Deployment of traditional solutions often includes on-site installation and configuration. Because there's a lot to set up, it's not unusual to run into snags along the way. Even small delays make it difficult to work during implementation. Talk about a frustrating experience for your staff.

By contrast, cloud solutions don't require on-premise equipment or configuration. If there's any software to install, it's typically quick and painless. That makes it possible to roll out cloud solutions without the hassle of an irritating transition period. In fact, 37% of small businesses go with cloud applications specifically because of speed of deployment.

Once everything's in place, there's no need to worry about maintenance, updates or upgrades. The cloud solution provider will handle all of that for you. Even if you decide to add new services or users later, the impact on your employees should be minimal.

Finally, you don't have to give up performance when working with cloud software. Granted, some organizations rely on complex processes, and sometimes they need local solutions to get the most optimal performance. But most small and medium-size businesses find cloud solutions to be as fast as (if not faster than) their existing systems. There's some beefy processing power behind these services.
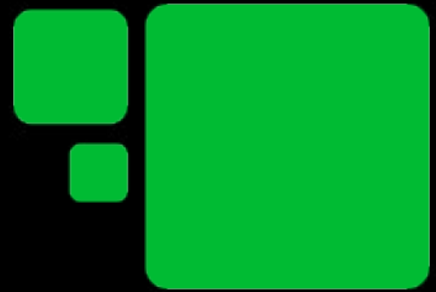
You don't have to sacrifice performance in order to work in the cloud.

"37% of small businesses go with cloud applications specifically because of speed of deployment."

– Forbes

Sophistication

It wasn't that long ago that the upper tier of IT tools was the exclusive domain of big business. Only organizations with insanely high IT budgets could afford the best technology. Smaller companies weren't without options, but there was definitely a difference.

The cloud has done more than narrow the gap. It's practically eliminated it. Cloud providers offer the very same solutions, options and features to businesses of all sizes. The sophisticated processes large corporations rely on are available to SMBs, as well. And savvy small business owners have taken notice.

Cloud computing helps organizations in virtually every industry. Manufacturers can take advantage of affordable, cloud-based Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems to better manage and integrate their planning, purchasing, inventory, sales, marketing, finance and human resource functions. Attorneys can leverage cloud-based systems to handle time tracking, case and client management. Property managers have access to cloud software designed to automate, modernize, and grow their business. Health care providers can more easily achieve HIPAA compliance with cloud computing. The list is endless.

The improved efficiency that cloud computing offers businesses can be game-changing. As Business.com reports, "74% of businesses feel like cloud computing has given them a competitive advantage."

Small-to-medium sized companies can harness the same sophisticated technologies that help big businesses thrive.

Stability

Outages are expensive, and SMBs aren't immune to the cost. Want some cold, hard stats? Downtime costs small businesses up to $8,600 per hour. When your system is down, you can't do business. It's as simple as that. Every minute you lose is money out the door.

If your technology is all on-site, then it's on you to keep it up and running 24/7. All kinds of things can make that difficult. Power outages, natural disasters, cyberattacks and hardware issues each have the potential to bring your entire business to a grinding halt.

Unless you're running in the cloud.

Cloud solutions are remote. They are architected to operate from purpose-built, hardened data centers, with battery and generator backups to allow them to continue operating even in the event of a long term power outage. They have redundant, high-speed fiber Internet connections. And they limit access to only those who can pass a fingerprint and retinal scan. Cloud providers know their clients are counting on their services. They take security and maintenance seriously. As a result, these services tend to be extremely reliable.
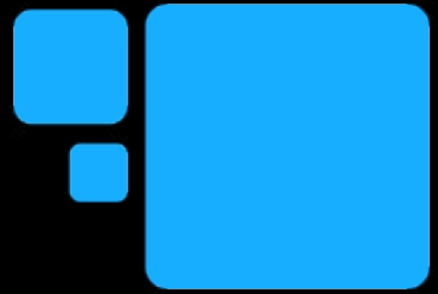
That stability means you won't have to worry about losing time or money to an offline application. Even if you don't have power on-site, you can access cloud services from any connected device. The cloud makes your business much more outage-resistant.

In the following chapter, we'll take a closer look at how cloud services add an extra layer of protection to your security.

CHAPTER THREE:

Why You Can Trust the Cloud

Businesses are split on how they feel about the security of cloud services. Some small business leaders say security concerns are keeping them from moving to the cloud. But at the same time, some of IT professionals believe the cloud is more secure than a legacy system.

It can be confusing.

To further complicate the issue, we see news stories all the time about major data breaches. If world-wide companies with massive IT budgets can't keep their data secure, who can? It only makes sense for small business decision-makers to have misgivings about storing their data in the cloud.

However, more often than not cloud computing security is better than the average SMB's own security. Even if your organization is militant about keeping data safe, it's hard to compete with cloud providers. These guys have some noteworthy security in place.

Let's look at three key areas.

Maintenance and Protection

You likely take your own network's security seriously. That's a good thing. Recent trends show that small businesses are definitely at risk for cyberattacks.

Naturally, cloud security is a concern for providers. They're well aware of the implications of a data breach. To protect their clients (and themselves), they do a lot to mitigate attacks.
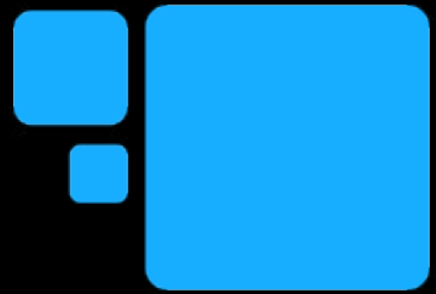
The software protecting their data centers is top-notch. They use dedicated and redundant servers. Data is often encrypted for additional protection. And the whole thing is monitored around the clock.

Additionally, they're all over software and hardware maintenance. They don't drag their feet on critical updates, for example, and they monitor the performance and stability of their servers. Few small businesses invest as much time or energy into maintenance.

"64% of IT professionals believe the cloud is more secure than a legacy system."

– Statista

IT Professionals

Of course, there are actual human beings behind cloud security. The knowledge and expertise these pros bring to bear is considerable. That makes sense. Cloud providers have the resources to make sure their teams are well-staffed.

This is what one expert calls "shared threat protection." Cloud providers serve a lot of different clients. Because they aggregate so much data, they can aggregate protection, too. A big part of that is hiring top cloud security experts. The average small business won't have the same kind of expertise in-house. Which is not to say your IT staff is lacking. Rather, it's like comparing the very competent mechanic who repairs your car with a NASCAR pit crew. The NASCAR folks are operating on a different level.

Similarly, the cloud security pros protecting your data are people you can trust to know their stuff.

Backups & Replication

Proper cloud solutions will include backups of your data across multiple servers in multiple locations.

Data replication is a safety net. As much as we rely on technology, it's hardly infallible. Hardware breaks. Servers go offline. Data gets corrupted. Backups and duplicates ensure against lost information. If something goes wrong with one set of data or one server, there's another copy ready to go.

In contrast, most small businesses don't have the same kind of redundancy. They just can't afford to invest the money (and time) to ensure the level of disaster recovery and business continuity that is built-in to cloud computing.

A Final Word

Cloud services help boost your security. You get the benefit of professional-grade protection, industry expertise and data backup. Together, these are wonderful additions to your overall security strategy.

However, it's worth noting that cloud services only provide an additional layer of protection. Using cloud solutions is not, by itself, a complete security plan. Think of cloud solutions as a smart way to round out your other security efforts, not a full security strategy.

In the next chapter, we'll look at the final advantage of working in the cloud – mobility.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Hello, Remote Access

You know all about remote access. You use it every day.

Within the last hour, you've likely looked at your smartphone. The text you just got from a friend or the notification from your social network of choice – that was remote access in action. You can be almost anywhere and stay connected.

It's revolutionary.

What you may not know is how powerful remote access can be for business. Imagine being able to access your documents virtually anytime, anywhere easily. Imagine being able to log in and access your computer "desktop" and run your accounting, ERP or CRM system from a tablet or even a smartphone. Imagine keeping tabs on your most critical KPIs in real-time, no matter where you are. Now imagine doing this without the need to make sure the desktop computer in your office is on and available.

Productivity skyrockets

All from the cloud.

The cloud is the linchpin. Without the cloud, you could work remotely, but on a far more limited basis. You may not have access to live data. You won't be able to communicate seamlessly with your team. And there would almost certainly be things you'd have to be in the office to get done.

But with the right cloud solutions in place, you can work from anywhere as long as you have an Internet connection. And so can your employees.

Unleash Yourself

It's estimated there are 25 million meetings every day in the US. You don't even need the next stat to know they aren't all worthwhile, but let's go ahead a put a number to the inefficiency. $37 billion. That's how much money is wasted every year on pointless meetings.

Unproductive office time costs you money. And if you're a business leader, the opportunities for unproductive office time are plentiful.

Getting out of the office might mean sitting down with your top client to strengthen the relationship. It might mean plowing through some reports or email in the comfort of your living room. Or it could mean closing a deal with that prospect who refuses sales calls but is always ready to play a round of golf.

Cloud solutions create the freedom to get more done while keeping you plugged in.

Unleash Your People

On average, employees who work from home are 13% more productive. They take fewer breaks, call in sick less often, and make more calls per minute. They're also far more likely to stick with the same job. The attrition rate for work-from-home employees is 50% lower than their in-office counterparts.

"Employees who work from home are 13% more productive"

– Stanford University

Those are some impressive numbers, but it's entirely possible you're still not sold on the idea of letting your people work remotely. If so, you're not alone. Plenty of business leaders cringe at the thought. Their reasons range from a lack of trust to practical concerns.

Some jobs require office presence. If you rely on special equipment or if your employees don't have laptops, working remote may not be a viable option. You could even make the argument that collaboration suffers when everyone's not in the same space.

However, working from home doesn't have to be an all or nothing thing. 45% of telecommuters work remotely five or fewer days a month. Even when offered on a limited basis, working remote is still beneficial.
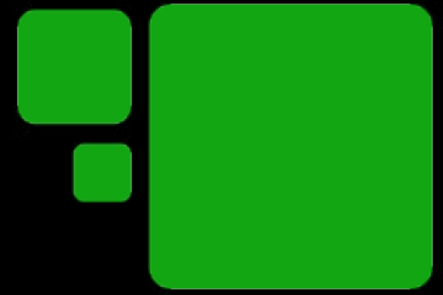
When your business works in the cloud, you can let your staff work remotely and improve productivity at the same time.

Making It Happen

The trick is striking the right balance. If moving to the cloud means losing functionality, it's not worth it.

Cloud solutions can add value, boost productivity, improve functionality, tighten security, and free you to work from anywhere. Determining the best cloud services for your team depends on how you work, what you do, how you measure success, and how your people function. There's no one-size-fits-all solution.

Which is why it's extremely helpful to call in the experts before making the move to the cloud.

Our team will learn about your business, its processes and procedures, the key line-of-business software you use, and your overall strategy for success. Only then will we work with you to develop an IT roadmap to help you leverage cloud computing and measure its ROI and success. We believe it's our job to make our clients successful, and we believe cloud services are a solid addition to many SMBs.

Contact us today if you'd like to learn more about how we can help you with the right cloud solutions for your business.

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